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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the growing community school movement in the United States. It begins with a discussion of the general basis for community schools, the community school concept, and the philosophy behind community schools. The author then shows what a community school can do and what it is like. The concluding section outlines the administrative structure of a community school. The author suggests what the role of board members, superintendent, principal, and the community school director should be. (DN)

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THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL
AND ITS CONCEPTS

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I. What is the general basis for Community Schools?

So long as our society holds the concept that "education" is limited to what is or is not done by the formal school--kindergarten through the university level--the formal school will continue to be the whipping boy for society. We have just come through a round in which the public schools, kindergarten through high school, served this purpose. Now the colleges and universities are feeling the lash of public opinion.

We must somehow get a new concept of education. The people must believe that education is a life long process for which the individual himself and the society in which he lives are jointly responsible. They must see that there are several educational agencies, of which the formal school is but one. They must see that perhaps the most complex, and certainly one of the most important, of the educational agencies is the community.

The total range of agencies which play a part in the education of most individuals consists of the self, the home, the church, the community, the formal school, one or more special schools (such as one finds legion in the Yellow Pages of any city telephone directory), social or other special interest groups (such as clubs and lodges), and occupational groups. Of these, any individual who is not mentally atypical is certain to be influenced by only three: the self, the community, and the formal school. A particular individual may have no home (in the family sense); may never see the inside of a church; may never attend a special school or be a part of a social, occupational or other special interest group; but he will in all likelihood be both a part of a community and a pupil in a school. This suggests that these two most important educational agencies should combine to strengthen their influence over the individual and to get him to make full use of all the educational agencies and opportunities available to him.¹

¹ Boles, Harold W. "The Community as an Agency of Education", The Community School and Its Administration, Vol. II, #5, Jan 1964.

2. What is the Community School Concept?

The community school concept aims at transforming the traditional role of the neighborhood school into that of a total community center for people of all ages and backgrounds, operating extended hours throughout the year. The school works in partnership with other groups in the community to provide recreational, educational (underline mine) and a variety of other community and social services. Maximum use of community resources through total community involvement achieves broad and diversified programs. Every community school designs its program to meet the needs of the particular people it serves. Economy results from new uses of existing resources as well as elimination of duplication of effort, which now occurs.²

The community school concept is spreading like a ground swell across the nation!

It is based on the premise that the schools belong to the people, and that local resources can be harnessed to attack community problems. With the public schools used as community centers, the total needs of communities can be served. A trained community school director coordinates this effort to combat community problems.

The Philosophy repeats the concept of the little red school house of the previous generation. Then, the school house served as the community center for all activities. The teacher sometimes lived with the families he taught, becoming familiar with their needs and desires, their abilities and expectations. Today there is still a need to maintain this type of compassion and understanding. Community education attempts to achieve this.³

²92nd Cong. 1st Sess. Volume 117, #151, 12 Oct 71

³National Community School Education Assn. brochure

3. What Is the Philosophy behind Community Schools?

The community school concept is predicated on the fact that community schools will be open on weekdays, and will be available for programs on weekends and during the summer months. The main emphasis in structuring a longer school day, week and year is to allow for the full development of the community school philosophy which is adopted by the local Board of Education and which defines basic functions which are designed to meet local needs.

1. an educational center - where children and adults have optimum opportunities for study and learning.
2. a neighborhood center for cultural and recreational activities - the school serving as a focal point for community leisure-time activities and involving: recreation, group work, adult education, adult basic education, civic meetings, tutoring, senior citizens activities, arts and crafts, drama.
3. a center for social services - where individuals and families may obtain health and counseling services, legal aid, employment services, and other leisure-time activities.
4. a center of neighborhood and community life - an institution assisting citizens in the study and solution of neighborhood problems.

This philosophy envisions the school serving as the focus for community programs, action and involvement. At the very heart of the concept is the active participation of residents in all phases of the school operation.⁴

Community School Education is a comprehensive and dynamic approach to public education. It is a philosophy that pervades all segments of education programming and directs the thrust of each of them towards the needs of the community. The community school serves as a catalytic agent by providing leadership to mobilize community resources to solve identified community problems. This marshalling of all forces in the community helps to bring about change as the school extends itself to all people.

"Community School Education either affects all children, youth and adults directly or it helps to create an atmosphere and environment in which all men find security and self confidence, thus enabling them to grow and mature in a community which sees its school as an integral part of community life."⁵

⁴The Comm. School Program in New Haven, Gerald Tirozzi, Oct '71.

⁵NCSEA Brochure

4. What can a Community School do?

Your local school could be.....a place where:

Children and adults can study and learn and where learning can take place 18 hours a day or more;

Educational or vocational skills of people of all ages can be upgraded for the benefit of the individual and the community;

People of all ages can take part in such activities as sports; physical fitness programs; informal recreation, arts and crafts, musical programs, civic meetings, adult education, home economics, tutoring;

People can find health services, counseling services, legal aid, employment services, homemaking help;

All residents of the community can study and cooperate in the solution of significant neighborhood problems.⁶

Among this program's hidden advantages: Vandalism in and around the school has become negligible. Now the new high school, says the architect, "is being developed as a community school, with all the facilities for full-time year-round use for young and old"...

Boco Raton's Community Education Director says, "Silence may well be the costliest item in our school budget today. The waste of public facilities lying idle for a great portion of the afternoon and evening far outweighs the cost of opening the doors for community use."

The possibilities for using a community school to your own and community's advantage are limited only by the limits of your imaginations -- which could mean they are limitless.⁷

⁶Herman, Barry E., of New Haven's Winchester Comm. School, "Better Use of Schools Can Cut Tax", Sylvia Porter Syndicated Column, June 12, 1972.

⁷Herman [as above] "Idle Schools Are Waste of Resources", Sylvia Porter Syndicated Column, June 13, 1972.

5. What is a Community School Like?

On Thursday, March 23, 1972, Dr. Robert Young, Superintendent of Schools, and Mr. John R. Hughes, Head of Department of Community Schools, W.C.S., attended a conference at New Haven, Connecticut to study and become more acquainted with the community school concept for which New Haven is well known.

The Harry A. Conte Community School opened its doors to the citizens of the Worcester Square neighborhood in September 1962; one of ten community schools now in operation in New Haven. It is a three and a half million dollar complex consisting of four buildings located on a six acre site. The architect for the school was Skidmore, Owens and Merrill. The school is named in memory of a dedicated physician who unceasingly gave of his time and energy to the people of New Haven. Conte Community School, in contrast with the traditional school, operates day and night twelve months a year. This extensive school day and year make it possible to meet the needs of the total community. To help assure a meaningful and diversified program, outside agencies and groups are encouraged to use the school facilities as a base of operations. This means that education is not the task of educators alone but that many outside groups can and do provide services which supplement and enrich the traditional school program. Conte's school philosophy dictates a total approach to education. The existence of the school is largely due to the city's extensive redevelopment program. After physical renewal had been underway for several years, it became aware that physical renewal had to be supplemented with human renewal if the full long range value was to be realized. Thus it was decided to build a school that would be the focal point of neighborhood life and a center of community action. The school would provide the impetus through programming and involvement, to mold the neighborhood into a cohesive unit committed to the betterment of community life and services. The school was envisioned as an integral part of the neighborhood and the neighborhood as an integral part of the school. The following are excerpts from a walking tour of the school facility starting with the auditorium, which was viewed from the outside only.⁸

"The auditorium seats 336, has its own movie projector, stage set up for theatrical use, 6-7 amateur theatre groups use it. Can be rented out for money making purposes."

⁸Northeast Mobile Seminar literature, Mar. 23, 1972, New Haven, Conn.

We now move into the school swimming pool which is designed as a shallow learning pool. A great amount of background noise comes from the children in a swim class. "Separate facilities for the gym, separate facilities for the pool with outside entrances. There are swimming classes every day, not only for students at Conte but every pupil in the city of New Haven. There are community swimmers. Lifeguard on duty at all times. In the summer, the pool is open all day. The pool is open 6 days a week, and for special groups on Sundays. As we move on the tour from the swimming pool to the gym, and then on to the cafeteria, we hear an excellent discussion of community involvement. "Conte is the only K-8 school in New Haven. The cafeteria is set up to serve the community. There are seven different neighborhood corporations--they have suppers here, etc. They only have to pay a small charge if it is a profit making project. There are three community councils. Presently, school community councils are being set up made of administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals and parents from the school--they have a say in hiring. Not the final vote. This is the first year--but as they develop, we hope they'll have more of a say, in curriculum, etc."

On our tour we now move into a kindergarten and then into a large courtyard which is the center of the school. "The children are at the Library now. ...Every classroom has two bathrooms, there is no need to leave the room. The courtyard in the spring is used as a little animal farm--what we have here are ducks, rabbits, and geese, some sheep. The kids get to come out here and feed them. The courtyard is easily accessible from the pool, gym, the lounge, the classrooms...." From the kindergarten we move into the health suite. "This is a dental and health clinic; a doctor comes in. After 4:00 the community is running a community health program, visiting nurses in cooperation with the neighborhood corporation. If it's anything serious, they are taken to one of the other clinics, or the hospital. The square is about 3 miles away from the hospital complex in New Haven. Health is one of the major concerns of the neighborhood corporation and this is the beginning of what they hope is a comprehensive health program. You notice there's an outside entrance so the school can be closed on Saturday if there's something going on. And the community can use the health suite without having to disrupt anything that's going on."

We now move through a third grade level class, and then into a school all-purpose room. "This all-purpose room is used as a community room--a pictorial room, a playroom; the community can hold five different activities here. Pingpong tables, game tables--6th, 7th and 8th graders use it quite a bit. There have been as many as 250 people in this room--this is a very social neighborhood."

As we again move outside on our tour, we get a description of the community influence on the way the outside courtyards have been set up. "This is predominately a Black and Italian neighborhood, some from the old country--therefore many of the old games are carried over. When they designed the school, they wanted room where they could play some Botchi. So if you come around here in the summer at night you see a lot of people around the courts. They really have themselves a time. Tables have chess and checkerboard tops. We are now going to the two buildings that really belong to the community. The one on our left is the senior citizen center...."

We now move to a section of rooms devoted solely to the old folks of the community. It's divided into two parts, men on one side, and women on the other. They play cards, they smoke, they paint pictures. It is almost entirely run by the people from the Park's Department. We now on our tour move into the school library which is designed for both school and community use. "It's been hard to get the community to use the library. We've tried story telling, both adult and children."

Question: Is there any interrelationship with Yale?

Answer: New Haven has very little to do with Yale as far as a community school concept is concerned. Yale Divinity School runs a work program--so we can get volunteers. But as far as using their facilities and brain power, we have absolutely nothing to do with it. We have a state run teacher's college in the city--elementary teachers; and there are four teacher's colleges in the state. We have an excellent relationship with the State of Connecticut. The teachers who are interested in teaching in an urban area go to the four largest cities in Connecticut; they are housed in a former school made into a dorm. They are then sent into the seven intercity neighborhoods for about five months. Now their function is to work not in the schools, but with the community organization within that section. Their practice teaching is then done--ideally--within that section which they had originally been sent to. We do a tremendous amount of recruiting for southern Black teachers. And this year, we went to the University of Puerto Rico to ask if there's anyone who would like to come up here. About 7% of our students are now bilingual. The city is now 52% Black and 9% Puerto Rican. There is a greater need for Black and Puerto Rican teachers. Community school concept in New Haven is about 10-11 years old. About four administrators have come up through the ranks and know what it's all about. This helps.

6. What is the Administrative structure of a Community School?

Roles of Board Members: Board members should be students of the community's educational needs. They should be listeners, participants in Community Education, communication links between schools, organizations and persons young and old. They should see their responsibilities as that of making sure that there are educational opportunities for all and that the community's educational resources are fully employed. Finally, they should support the professional staff of the educational system in its complex and significant leadership responsibility.

Superintendents: The superintendent should be the prime educational leader of his community. He should be a constant student of the community and its needs and challenges. Unless the community is quite small, he should not be the operating head of the educational system. He should keep himself free of detail, have time to confer with staff and the people of the community. He should be a thinker, a planner, an inspiring leader. He should be responsible for seeing to it that teachers and children are free to learn.

Principals: The role of the principal is similar to that of the superintendent, except that the area he covers is smaller. In general, he needs the same qualities of personality and leadership. He is every day involved in leadership in a learning program. He is engaged in mobilizing the community's resources and in interpreting the program to the community. He is an operating administrator in the best educational sense.

The Model From Which The Roles Emerge: The model calls for a flat and not a tall organization. It sees the teacher as a fully competent decision maker. It makes specialized services available to the teacher as a prime decision maker, but these persons have no power to command. Communication moves not only vertically but horizontally from teacher to teacher, child to child, parent to parent.

Individual schools have much freedom--individual teachers have much freedom--principals are free to develop schools with individuality. This individuality owes much of its uniqueness to the community and community resources.

It is difficult to portray the model or the basic theory because professional minds are cluttered with the obsolete and destructive patterns and the massive body of subject matter which to many of us is the focus of education. One can learn all the facts and skills and remain an uneducated person. Unless our outlook changes we can draw all the diagrams, depict all the roles and yet all concerned tend to fall back in the old routine.

Are we willing to admit that each child is unique and should have an educational experience that helps him to develop his uniqueness? Are we ready to act on the assumption that the self image the child brings home from school is more important than the number of words he learned to spell today? Are we ready to grant that the self image the teacher has when he closes the classroom door is more important than the degree of his conformity to curricula and rules? If we are, we can begin to build the new model with its appropriate roles for all the required personnel.⁹

A Community School Director should be: More of an orienteering question-man than an all-knowing answer-man; more of a catalyst to social action than a big-time promoter; more of a community development encourager than an activity-level technician.

More of a back-stage prompter than an up-stage prima donna; more of a democratic faith-header than an autocratic or paternalistic medicine man; more of a semantic analyst than a verbal cosmetician.

More of a social thinker than a social butterfly; more of a social lifter than a social climber; more of a utopian idealist with the nerve of failure than a timid or cynical rationalizer of the status quo.

More of an informal educator than a bouncy baby-sitter; more of a producer than an entertainer; more of a people-centered expeditor than a self-serving glory hunter.

More interested in community improvement than community competition; more interested in the indicators of true involvement than the statistics of participation; more concerned with building community self-help programs than with building a personal following; more interested in developing a program based primarily on voluntary self-help than tax-supported paid help.

More of a far-sighted standard-setter than a vested interest standard-bearer; more concerned with problem-solving than fault-finding; more concerned with selling the objectives of the program than the activities in themselves.

More of a group-process ghost-rider than a pep-talking cheer-leader; more interested in using the power of his position as a "facilitative authority" to develop the "authority of shared ideas" rather than in using his power for personal aggrandizement.

⁹Melby, Ernest O. "New Dimensions to the Roles of Educational Personnel When the Community Education Approach to Learning is Implemented", The Comm. School and Its Administration, Vol. X, #12, Aug 1972.

And perhaps of most importance--were concerned with programs which foster the development of the "inner resources" of individuals rather than programs for the short-lived amusement of groups.¹⁰

¹⁰Frank, Dr. Roland G., Northeast Comm. School Development Center, U-Conn., Storrs, Conn.